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## SUCCESS STORY

# Radio Brings Laughs, Informs Citizens

*Radio supports democracy by highlighting election info.*



[Photo: USAID]

Peace Message Radio also provides volunteer internship opportunities to high school and university students wanting to gain experience in journalism. "We have an open door policy; there is a place for anyone who wants to work here," says the director. There are currently eight students from nearby Khost University that volunteer their time in between classes. The internship serves as a valuable complement to the USAID-supported Sayara Novice Journalism Training program, part of the journalism curriculum at the university. The station also provides internships to high school students, where they gain work experience and on-the-job training.

From a hill overlooking Khost city, democracy is spreading across the region. Peace Message Radio, established with support from USAID's Democracy and Governance office, is an independent radio station that attracts over 80% of radio listeners in the province of Khost. In the two years since its founding, it has given a voice to women, reached out to the local madrassas, provided comprehensive coverage of the parliamentary elections, and has granted opportunities for high school and college students to learn about journalism hands-on.

Peace Message Radio's most popular program is *Bouquet of Flowers*, which involves listeners writing letters to the station with jokes, folk stories, and poems. The station receives 200-300 letters per week, the majority coming from women. They also host interviews with men and women in the community who voice their political opinions, hopes and concerns for Afghanistan. "It provides a great opportunity for women to be recognized," says a reporter at the station.

*Natya Kallam* (Speaking of the Prophet) is a show that has brought dramatic change to the province after only one month on the air. With its readings of the Koran and religious lectures, the show is attracting the attention of madrassas in the area. "For the first time in decades, students and teachers in the madrassas are listening to the radio," says Shazad, the director. "An important Mullah in the city used to ignore me when we passed each other. Last week he stopped me, gave me a hug and thanked me for airing this program. Also, since many of the madrasa students now have radios, they are listening to our other programs, like our news reports."

In 2005, Peace Message Radio provided the most in-depth coverage of the parliamentary elections in Khost province. It aired discussions on how to select a candidate, election information by the Afghan government, and granted each of the eighty candidates five minutes of airtime to state their platform. Peace Message Radio's election coverage was so effective that it beat out 64 other Afghan stations to earn the top national prize for overall programming in 2005.